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VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR LIBRARY TECHNICIANS, A SURVEY OF
EXPERIENCE TO DATE.

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A STUDY WAS UNDERTAKEN TO OBTAIN AND COMPILE INFORMATION
FROM INSTITUTIONS WHICH HAVE DEVELOPED TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR
LIBRARY TECHNICIANS. THE COMPILATION, IN REPORT FORM, WAS
INTENDED FOR ADMINISTRATORS WHO PLAN TO START LIBRARY
TRAINING PROGRAMS, AND FOR STUDENTS, VOCATIONAL COUNSELORS,
AND POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS WHO LACK INFORMATION ABOUT EXISTING
PROGRAMS. INFORMATION WAS RECEIVED FROM 24 INSTITUTIONS
CURRENTLY OFFERING LIBRARY INSTRUCTION AT THE CLERICAL OR
TECHNICAL LEVEL. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY WERE AS FOLLOWS--(1)
MOST ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE ARE ONLY
AWARE OF AS MANY AS FOUR OR FIVE PROGRAMS OTHER THAN THEIR
OWN, (2) EXISTING PROGRAMS APPEAR "TO WORK". NO ATTEMPT WAS
MADE TO EVALUATE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS, (3) THE LARGEST
IDENTIFIABLE GROUP OF LIBRARY STUDENTS IS A GROUP OF WOMEN
BEYOND COLLEGE AGE, AND (4) SYSTEMATIC RECRUITMENT EFFORTS
ARE NOT APPARENT. OTHER FINDINGS WERE RELEVANT TO THE
FOLLOWING TOPICS--(1) TYPES OF LIBRARIES EMPLOYING
TECHNICIANS, (2) INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS, (3) THE
INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF, AND (4) THE JOB MARKET. FURTHER RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY APPEARED TO BE NEEDED IN A NUMBER OF
AREAS, AND SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS WERE OUTLINED. (JC)

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VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR
LIBRARY TECHNICIANS:
A Survey of Experience to Date

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

October 1965

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**Vocational Training for Library Technicians:
A Survey of Experience to Date**

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FOREWORD

Research which contributes to the solution of biomedical library problems has been a continuing concern of the Institute for Advancement of Medical Communication. The idea for the study reported here was conceived and developed by the author while he was a Research Fellow at the Institute. He was struck by the great disparity between the number of biomedical libraries in this country and the current supply of professional level personnel to man these libraries.

Without a new approach to the problem of library manpower, prospects for closing this large and growing gap are dismal indeed. Educating and training a professional level biomedical librarian takes years, and the abilities and aptitudes required of students sharply limit the number of potential candidates for such training. Even if, by some magic, training facilities could be expanded many-fold overnight, the output of librarians would be "too little and too late." Although this output must be increased as rapidly as possible without sacrificing quality, something more is needed.

One hope is that the routine and repetitive tasks librarians now perform can be turned over to machines, thereby enabling them to concentrate on activities that demand professional knowledge and experience. Someday perhaps, one highly trained librarian managing automated systems of marvelous speed and capacity may be able, single-handedly, to serve thousands of users. Until then, however, another means of stretching our resources of librarian manpower can be employed — one that has proved very effective for multiplying the effectiveness of other professionals, namely, giving them subprofessional assistants who can be trained rapidly and in relatively large numbers. The present study is based on the premise that this stratagem, when combined with expansion of facilities for training librarians and exploitation of modern technology, promises much toward alleviating the problems of biomedical libraries.

Richard Orr, M.D.
Director, Institute for
Advancement of Medical
Communication

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. . . In terms of technical education and the interests of technical people I think that it is perfectly clear that the kinds of technical people who translate knowledge of science into practical use must be more concerned with information than with matter and energy. They will be involved directly with designing information handling systems and control systems; and they will be working on programs for document retrieval, information dissemination and display. But in all these instances the thing that is being handled is information. And the thing that is being optimized is how to use information for various practical purposes.

— Dr. J. Herbert Hollomon, Assistant Secretary for
Science and Technology, Department of Commerce

INTRODUCTION

Motivation for the research described in the following pages derives from a concern about medical communication. It is assumed that the flow of information to biomedical researchers, health professionals, and the general public could be facilitated by strengthening medical library services. If this problem is viewed in the perspective of society's general need for better information services, finding ways to provide medical librarians with subprofessional support appears to be a special case of a widespread problem. For this reason the scope of the study was broadened to include the training of library subprofessionals generally.

In a discussion of this question with a staff member of the Office of Manpower, Automation and Training at the U. S. Department of Labor a relevant observation was made. In June 1964 there were approximately 2,800,000 eighteen year olds in the United States. A year later the number was close to 3,800,000. This sort of statistic suggests a basic question which this report only begins to touch upon, i.e., can the human resources provided by the "population explosion" be effectively utilized to deal with the problems presented by the "information explosion"? If so, what are the cost/benefit ratios of the different ways of accomplishing this? In August 1964 a general discussion of these questions and the problems

of technical education for library personnel was begun at the U. S. Office of Education. In December a formal proposal was submitted to the Division of Vocational and Technical Education; the request was granted, and the survey was conducted between April and September 1965.

For the purposes of this study, the following definition was adopted: Librarians manage collisions between people and ideas in organizations which store information. From this it follows that the professional qualifications of a librarian include: wide-ranging intellectual interests (ideas); responsiveness and sensitivity to individual needs (people); and the ability to arrange collections of recorded ideas and guide people toward them (management). In all three of these task areas professional librarians can probably be assisted by various kinds of subprofessional personnel possessing different skills and experience. But what skills and experience should be matched against which problems or tasks in a library environment? To answer such a question, more would have to be done in the way of time-motion studies and operational research in libraries than has been the case in the past, but such an analysis was not the purpose of this study. Here the immediate goal has been simply to find out what institutions have established formal classroom

training programs for library technicians (in contrast to on-the-job or apprentice-type training). The primary focus of the inquiry did not encompass in-service training of library employees or undergraduate programs leading to the baccalaureate degree.

While a working definition of a librarian has been attempted, no such definition of the technician or technical assistant is offered. This is unquestionably an issue which must be resolved if progress is to be made; however, a precise definition of a library technician's role will require considerably more research than this introductory survey can provide. For the present only an operational definition can be offered: A library technician is a graduate of the programs described in this report. The programs included are those that offer post-high school training not intended for the baccalaureate degree candidate. As in virtually all new problem areas, there is only limited agreement on terminology. Quite arbitrarily, but for the sake of consistency, the term "library technician" will generally be used throughout this report.

Acknowledgements. Four months of full-time effort were devoted to the execution of this study. Financial support of this activity came from the U.S. Office of Education, however, more than a year of thought and exploration preceded the submission of the research proposal. During my tenure as a Research Fellow at the Institute for Advancement of Medical Communication (IAMC), I was encouraged to develop and test this and other ideas. For providing

this opportunity, I am greatly indebted to the IAMC and to the National Heart Institute, which supports the IAMC's unique program for Research Fellows in biomedical communication. (U.S.P.H.S. Grant HE-5414).

Personal thanks are due to my colleagues at the IAMC for their stimulation, criticism, and support. It is necessary to acknowledge a special debt to the Institute's librarian, Mrs. Mildred Heatwole, for outstanding information services.

The production of this report would not have been possible without the editorial collaboration of Mrs. Mary Eldridge. Camera-ready copy was prepared for us by Mrs. Nita Wadson. From them the material passed into the hands of a most forbearing, cooperative and helpful printer, Mr. Robert Beard.

Finally, it must be pointed out that a survey such as this is really a collaborative effort in which the investigator is quite dependent upon the cooperation he receives from literally dozens of informants and respondents. There could be no study of library technician training were it not for years of dedicated effort administrators, teachers, and librarians around the country have devoted to such programs. There could be no report on these programs were it not for the willingness of these same individuals to share freely their knowledge and experience. This report is for them. In an important sense, though, it is from them. In any case, many thanks must be given to them.

CHAPTER I

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Information was received from 24 institutions currently offering library instruction at the clerical or technical level. Programs at three other schools which formerly offered such courses were also studied, and correspondence was received from two junior colleges planning to start their programs in the fall of 1965. There are probably a number of schools in one stage or another of initiating programs, but this cannot be readily determined until the next Survey of Organized Occupational Curriculums by the U.S. Office of Education.

Schools with library courses which were visited during this study include:

City College of San Francisco	San Francisco, California
College of the Siskiyous	Weed, California
Fullerton Junior College	Fullerton, California
Gavilan College	Hollister, California
Los Angeles Trade-Technical College	Los Angeles, California
Mt. San Antonio College	Walnut, California
Pasadena City College	Pasadena, California
Rio Hondo Junior College	Santa Fe Springs, California
Ferris State College	Big Rapids, Michigan
Lansing Community College	Lansing, Michigan
Salem County Technical Institute	Penns Grove, New Jersey
Ballard School of the YWCA	New York City, N. Y.
University of Toledo	Toledo, Ohio
Brigham Young University	Provo, Utah
U.S. Dept. Of Agriculture Graduate School	Washington, D. C.

Visits also were made to Diablo Valley College in Concord, California and Erie County Technical Institute in Buffalo, New York, which formerly offered library training.

Correspondence and telephone interviews produced information on existing programs at the following schools:

Citrus Junior College	Azusa, California
Porterville College	Porterville, California
Palomar College	San Marcos, California
Santa Ana College	Santa Ana, California
Santa Barbara City College	Santa Barbara, California
Lamar Junior College	Lamar, Colorado
Central YMCA Community College	Chicago, Illinois
Treasure Valley Community College	Ontario, Oregon
Puerto Rico Junior College	Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico

Correspondence was also received from Miami-Dade Junior College in Miami, Florida and Catonsville Community College in Catonsville, Maryland where programs will begin in the fall of 1965. Information was received about the program formerly conducted at Orange County Community College in Middletown, N. Y. Training offered by chapters of the Special Library Association and the American Hospital Association was also studied.

The population sampled, though not a completely exhaustive list of schools offering library courses can be described as comprehensive rather than representative. It is highly unlikely that any programs which have graduated more than 20 students in the past 3 years are not on the list. Most of the programs have existed less than 5 years, and they have all developed on a pragmatic basis in response to perceived needs in their immediate surroundings. As a result, they do not have a great deal in common and only limited generalizations can be made about the group as a whole. They are isolated from each other which inhibits the growth of common methods to attack similar problems.

Twenty-four institutions were identified in this survey, yet it was unusual to find an administrator or teacher acquainted with as many as 4 or 5 other programs. The most widely known program appears to be one which went out of existence--Orange County Community College (discussed in detail later). Often the older, well established and more successful programs such as those at Ballard School of the YWCA, Ferris State College, Mt. San Antonio College, Citrus College, or the USDA Graduate School, are entirely unknown to people planning or administering training programs.

The major findings set forth below represent a synthesis of general impressions more than a set of inferences drawn from groups of comparable data. In the case histories of programs, which constitute the main body of this report, the basis of the major findings is more fully documented.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. The Number of Programs.

One of the most surprising discoveries made in this survey was the number of institutions actually offering library courses at the subprofessional level. In none of the discussions which preceded the survey, nor in the course of the interviews, was there a suggestion from anyone that this number of schools should be studied. The author knew of 8 at the time of submitting the proposal and estimated that the total might be as high as 15.

2. The Effectiveness of the Programs.

No effort was made in this study to evaluate existing programs. This is an area of uncertainty which must be resolved by future research. Here it can only be reported that, by the commonly accepted standards of growth in enrollment, placement of graduates, personal statements of satisfaction by employees and employers, and interest in the programs on the part of administrators and advisory groups, the existing programs do appear to "work." None of the programs visited appeared likely to be discontinued in the near future, most of them have a growing enrollment, and in a few instances enrollment pressure is straining the capacity of the physical facilities presently available.

3. The Student Population.

The largest identifiable group of students is a group of women beyond normal college age who are working, or wish to work, in a library environment. Frequently they have raised their families and anticipate returning to the labor force. In many cases their education is being re-

sumed after a lapse of 15 or more years. In some cases these women are already employed in libraries and are enrolled to become eligible for upgrading. While middle-aged women form the largest single group of students, a sizeable number of recent high school graduates is also enrolled. This group, which is probably growing, is also predominantly female.

4. Recruitment.

Several schools produce for prospective students a pamphlet describing the program and future employment possibilities in quite general terms. In some cases a mimeographed sheet of questions and answers helpful to guidance counselors is distributed, but adequately supported and systematic recruitment efforts were not observed during this study. In most cases it appears that the students discover the program by finding it in the school catalog. "Recruitment," then, is largely a process of placing informative announcements where students who are already favorably disposed toward library work are likely to respond.

The favorable disposition toward libraries appears to develop largely for two reasons. The older group of students often have considerable experience as users of libraries. During interviews several students mentioned that the library experience of their children was an important factor in their own decision to seek library training. Among the younger students other influences appear to operate decisively. Interviews with recent high school graduates produced such statements as: "I worked in the library in high school," or "My high school librarian was a wonderful person," or "I didn't know what I wanted to major in when I came to the college, but I was in the Library Club in high school so I thought I might like the library assistant program." When asked what it is about library work that makes it attractive, the same group of students frequently answer, "Well, I want a job where I can work with people."

A relatively small, but significant, group of women seek library technician training because of their present or previous employment in commercial or industrial establish-

ments. They are frequently experienced secretaries in rapidly growing companies which need library services. If the manager of such a concern is unable to justify a full-scale library operation on the premises, he is likely to appoint an experienced secretary as the office "librarian." In the New York City area a high percentage of the students taking library clerical courses at Ballard School of the YWCA have this type of background. Analogously, many of the students in the library workshops offered by the American Hospital Association are employed in hospital libraries following employment in other departments of a hospital.

5. Types of Libraries Employing Technicians.

The graduates of library technician programs are employed for the most part in public and school libraries. Most of the curricula are designed with the needs of these employers in mind. However, the high proportion of relatively new programs, with few if any graduates as yet, makes it difficult to assemble meaningful statistics. Graduates of the program for aides in technical libraries at Salem County Technical Institute in Penns Grove, New Jersey have been employed by the DuPont Company library. Several years ago a program at Erie County Technical Institute in Buffalo, New York, trained technicians for chemical libraries. Graduates were successfully employed in a number of scientific establishments in the Buffalo area.

The employment of library technicians in government installations in the capital area has created special needs. These needs are met largely by the program in library techniques offered at the Graduate School of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The name of this institution is somewhat misleading here as the library program actually requires only a high school diploma for entrance.

6. Instructional Materials.

The lack of suitable texts and other materials was noted in many, if not most, of the schools contacted. Since the training of library technicians represents a new level of instruction or a new institutional setting for this instruc-

tion, it is not surprising to find instructors developing their own materials. To some extent supplementary reading lists are compiled from texts the instructors themselves used in graduate school. This is rarely satisfactory. Special materials designed for use by library technicians (workbooks, programed texts, audio-visual aids, etc.) are virtually non-existent.

7. The Instructional Staff.

The instructors encountered in this survey were, without exception, trained professional librarians who often had some special graduate training or teaching experience. Some had begun their careers as school librarians or had been high school teachers before entering library school. None, however, at the time of their own professional training had anticipated or made special preparation for their present role as instructors of library technicians.

Instructors are usually members of the school's library staff, employed originally as such, who then sought or accepted the new role on the teaching staff. In the overwhelming majority of cases the instructors continue to fulfill administrative duties in the library. At only two of the schools visited were librarians employed specifically as teachers. Consequently, instructors frequently complain that they do not have enough time to develop new materials, prepare for their classes, and staff the library.

8. The Job Market.

While all of the existing programs have developed in response to immediately perceived needs in their respective localities, there has been little systematic analysis of the likely future demand for library technicians. Before initiating the new program, the college staff commonly asks surrounding libraries or school districts. "If we start this program will you hire our graduates?" If there is enough positive response, the school catalog soon contains a description of the new program.

When a survey is taken to determine employer needs, there is usually a strong presumption that the potential employer understands what a library technician is likely to be able to contribute to his organization. Since most of the potential employers are assumed to be libraries, this is a reasonable presumption. However, it appears that to date no educational institution has engaged in job development activity designed to help employers understand their unrecognized need for employees with library technician training.

CONCLUSIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

1. The surprisingly large number of programs discovered suggests the possibility that such programs are proliferating rapidly. Better information is likely to be available in the future now that the term "Library Technician" appears on the form used in the Office of Education's annual Survey of Organized Occupational Curriculums. Given the ubiquitous nature of library manpower problems, along with the pragmatic and spontaneous quality of the response of community colleges to local situations, there would appear to be no insurmountable obstacle to the development of library technician programs in many of the nation's 719 junior colleges.*

2. The predominantly female character of the student body will probably continue in those programs designed to meet local needs for personnel in school and public libraries. To attract more men into the field it will be necessary to establish more programs designed to meet the special needs of scientific, technical, or business libraries. There appears to be no reason why this should not or could not be accomplished.

* This figure appears in the 1965 Junior College Directory published by the American Association of Junior Colleges. It represents a net increase of 41 over the number of schools listed in the 1964 edition.

3. The students' choice of library technician training because they "want to work with people" indicates a possible change in the older public image of a librarian as a "guardian of the books."

4. Perception of needs in a given area and the willingness of community colleges to make the appropriate responses, will be decisive in the growth of library technician programs. The chief limiting factor in the growth rate of these programs, however, is likely to be the availability of trained librarians with aptitude and ability to become teachers.

5. The pragmatic growth of library technician programs in response to local situations has produced curricula admirably suited to the more evident needs of particular areas. Once a program is established, however, this approach does little to preserve the kind of flexibility required to respond to emerging and less evident needs. In the absence of a continuing supply of innovative concepts, the earlier program concepts tend to become fixed and difficult to change.

6. It will not be possible to estimate the real future needs for library technicians until much more research is done analyzing all organizations which process and store quantities of information. Correspondingly, without greater knowledge about the probable future demand for library technicians, it will be difficult to decide what curricular innovations are appropriate. For example, the history of the library clerical program at Ballard School of the YWCA in New York City indicates that businesses are probably one of the largest (but least explored) areas of potential employment for library technicians.

OUTLINE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Further research and development activity appears to be needed in a number of areas. Specific recommendations are outlined below. In pursuing any one of these problem areas, however, it would seem wise to view particular actions in the broad context of the growth of all the information technologies. At the present time there is a substan-

tial (and apparently growing) demand for library workers. A comparable situation probably exists in such related fields as electronic data processing, message delivery services, telephone reference and answering services, direct mail and addressing services, reprographic services and in those industries which produce and service the equipment used by workers in all the above categories. The training of library technicians can be viewed as one curricular effort in a wide spectrum of training opportunities for subprofessionals in the information technologies.

Even though a wide-ranging survey of workers in the information field and their educational needs would be helpful, it appears that a number of specific research efforts could be profitably undertaken in the library technician area. These would include the following activities:

1. Recruitment

Increased utilization of existing materials and development of new ones would enable more high school librarians to give more students experience as library assistants or members of library clubs. Beyond the preparation of special materials for high school librarians, other research efforts could determine the best type of supporting services to offer school librarians for recruitment purposes.

2. Instructional Materials

Research and development are needed to provide better instructional materials for library technician courses. The foremost need is for material suitable for use in community colleges; although many clerical tasks could probably be taught at the high school level if the proper materials were available.

3. Teacher Training

As suggested earlier, the supply of professional librarians available for teaching may be the chief limiting factor in the growth of library technician programs. Since none of the librarians now teaching in community colleges

anticipated his or her present role during graduate training in Library Science, special materials and methods should be developed to assist librarians who assume teaching responsibilities. To meet future needs, library schools should be assisted in making the curriculum changes necessary to prepare an increasing number of their graduates for teaching careers in community colleges.

4. Operations Research

The optimal matching of a technician's training and experience against specific library tasks (within the financial constraints imposed by reality) cannot be accomplished until the technician's role is adequately defined. To do this the technician's role must be understood in the context of all other library system operations. Therefore, research should be undertaken to provide more precise task analysis of the work of all library personnel. Operational research of this kind needs to be conducted in different types of libraries serving various groups of users.

5. The Job Market

Job market analysis in specific metropolitan areas or larger geographic regions is needed to provide better estimates of the present and future demand for library technicians. The responsibility for such research should logically be shared by a number of funding agencies. The Labor Department has an obvious interest in this area. Determination of the need for library technicians in the medical field could be undertaken by the Public Health Service. The Commerce Department and Small Business Administration should be concerned with the library manpower needs of business and industry. (Full implementation of the recently enacted State Technical Services Act will probably require a marked increase in technical information employees in business and industry.) Manpower in scientific and technical libraries concerns a number of funding agencies. The new Department of Urban Affairs will be dealing with city planning departments, many of

which have understaffed libraries. From all these sources a great deal of useful data could be collected to provide better estimates of the job market.

6. Curriculum Planning

Reliable information, useful to an administrator who is launching a library technician program, is virtually unobtainable at the present time. Systematic research should be undertaken to develop curriculum guidelines and other supporting material. While this cannot be accomplished in any final sense until research on library operations and job market analysis are undertaken (recommendations #4 and #5 above), much of the experience acquired in the development of existing programs could be made more readily available. Meetings and collaborative efforts among experienced teachers and administrators should be arranged for this purpose.

7. Evaluation

The development of curriculum guidelines calls for the concomitant development of methods of evaluation of library technician programs. One step in this direction would be the initiation of longitudinal studies. The real test of any educational program is the personal success its graduates enjoy and the nature of the contribution they make to society. This requires follow-up studies of library technicians over a number of years. A sufficient number of such graduates are now working to justify long term studies of their employment experience.

Other evaluative techniques can probably be developed. As information scientists develop sophisticated techniques for analyzing information systems it will be easier to estimate the cost and contribution of human resources in these systems. Cost analyses of training programs and the operation of information systems could be combined with measures of personnel effectiveness to provide better estimates of the value of library technician programs.